

Senator LEVIN has put his finger directly on the key issues facing our continued military occupation of Iraq.

The second amendment which is being debated is an amendment by the distinguished Senator from Massachusetts, Mr. KERRY. His amendment proposes that American troops be redeployed from Iraq no later than July 1, 2007. Senator KERRY should be commended for offering his amendment. It is an important amendment, and it deserves a full debate. It directly addresses the most pressing issue facing the American people today.

Last week the very distinguished Senator from Kentucky, Mr. McCONNELL, offered an amendment similar to that of Senator KERRY's. It was offered up as a sacrificial lamb, and a procedural motion was made to either kill the amendment or to continue debating it. I was one of six Senators who voted to continue debate on that amendment.

Some may seek to ascribe my vote as a vote for the substance of Senator McCONNELL's amendment. But I shall speak for myself. As I have told Senator KERRY, my vote was not for the substance of Senator McCONNELL's amendment. My vote was to continue debate on the most important issue in our country today. My vote was in favor of the institution of the U.S. Senate, a temple of debate and free speech.

Some may seek to hide from the controversial issue of Iraq, but I will not seek to hide from it. We Senators are sent by the people of our States to debate the critical issues facing our country, not to hide from them. My vote was in the minority on that procedural motion, but I stand by my vote which was in favor of debate on the momentous subject of Iraq.

The amendment the distinguished Senator from Massachusetts, Mr. KERRY, offers will likely be voted on tomorrow, and I have spoken to Senator KERRY about the substance of his amendment. I know he is seeking a change in the administration's policy toward Iraq, which is acknowledged by most Americans to be a disaster. And he should be saluted for his courage in insisting on offering his amendment, even though he will be criticized—and perhaps even called unpatriotic by some—for speaking his mind. However, I cannot support the substance of his amendment.

I do not support setting a drop-dead withdrawal date for our troops from Iraq. I do not believe that this is a wise policy. I have called time and time again for the President to begin bringing our troops home. Our troops cannot be brought home overnight.

I also have concerns that this amendment is not strongly tied to the constitutional powers of Congress relating to the conduct of war.

So for these reasons, for as much as I support his efforts to make a change in an ill-defined, open-ended, stay-the-course policy in Iraq, I will not support the amendment by the distinguished

Senator from Massachusetts, Mr. KERRY.

But there are other ways to effect a change in direction. So I rise today to ask that I may be given time to offer another amendment on Iraq.

There is an urgent need for the U.S. Senate to consider as many options as we can to find an exit strategy with honor for our troops. Our country is polarized. The Senate is polarized. And I fear that we have let the usual partisan warfare put blinders, such as we put on horses, on ourselves and on our purpose.

Every Member in this body, I am sure, would like to see a successful end to the war in Iraq. Every Member of this body on both sides of the aisle would like to do something that would speed the return of our troops home to the loving arms of their families.

All of us, regardless of party affiliation, want to do the best thing for our country. And we would all do well to remember that both the President, the Chief Executive, and the Congress have important roles to play when it comes to the most critical decisions that can be made by any government; namely, the decision to go to war and the decision to come home from war.

The American people are dismayed, as they should be, by this conflict in Iraq. I voted against our entry into that war. I voted against the invasion of that country without any provocation toward our country.

Most assuredly, dozens of mistakes have been made and billions of dollars have been spent. Without a doubt, our international reputation has been damaged, and we are losing the support of our own people for a drawn-out commitment in Iraq and more and more loss of precious blood, precious life.

Can we not try one more approach? Can we not? Can we not spend just a little more time on the consideration of a way out of Iraq? Can we not? Can we not? Can we not attempt to speak with one voice on the matter? Is that asking too much?

I have a third way. This is a fresh approach, I believe. It returns Congress's rightful voice to the warmaking power, yet it avoids the pitfalls of usurping the executive branch's role in an ongoing war. It is respectful of the separation of powers, but it does outline a viable exit strategy for Iraq.

The amendment I would like to offer, the amendment I would like to see debated on the Senate floor, is an effort to move the debate over the war in Iraq away from the realm of political mudslinging to the realm of constitutional responsibility.

My amendment is a simple, straightforward approach to laying out a roadmap to bring our troops home from Iraq with honor and dignity, the honor and the dignity which they deserve.

My amendment establishes the policy that the democratically elected Government of Iraq should assume responsibility for its own security. My amendment sets forth the conditions

under which the congressional authority to maintain U.S. troops in Iraq would expire.

This amendment is a genuinely fresh approach to unraveling the conundrum of how to disengage the U.S. military from Iraq. My approach does not attempt to micromanage the war. It is not an attempt to set artificial deadlines. It is not based on politically motivated rhetoric. It does not preempt the authority of either the President or the Congress. What it does do is it returns the focus of the debate to the role of Congress in the authorization of war. What my amendment does do is to reassert—yes, reassert—the role of Congress to authorize—or to terminate the authorization of—the use of force.

The conditions under which the Iraq use of force authorization would expire are based on circumstances, not on timetables, and they include the following: When the Government of Iraq assumes responsibility for its own security; or if a multinational peacekeeping force were to assume responsibility for security in Iraq; or if the President certifies that the United States has achieved its objectives in Iraq; or if Congress were to enact a joint resolution to terminate the use of force authority.

Mr. President, the situation in Iraq has undergone seismic changes since the original use-of-force authorization was granted by Congress in October of 2002. Since that time, our troops have completed the mission of removing Saddam Hussein from power and paving the way for the establishment of a democratically elected government in Iraq. The authorization under which the United States sent its military forces into Iraq—which I voted against—is now painfully outdated. So it is time to update that authorization to provide a statutory framework for returning our troops home, and to acknowledge that the war in Iraq does have an end point and is not an open-ended commitment.

Mr. President, it is most important to understand that the amendment I am proposing speaks only to the intent and authority of Congress. So it does not—hear me now—it does not infringe upon, or in any way usurp, the authority of the President. No Senator has to set aside his or her support or opposition to the war in order to support my approach.

But this amendment would send a powerful message to the people of the United States and to the people of Iraq, and especially to the democratically elected Government of Iraq. It would send the powerful message that the United States supports the security of Iraq but does not intend to become a permanent occupying force in Iraq. This is a message that the people of Iraq need to hear. It is a message that the people of the United States need to hear. It is a message that the people of the United States are clamoring to hear. My amendment is a realistic roadmap for the United States to remove its forces from Iraq in an orderly